The Stray

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/15513915.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal (TV), Lady and the Tramp (1955)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Brian Zeller, Jimmy Price, Tony (Disney: Lady and the Tramp), Mischa Lecter, Lady Murasaki (Hannibal Rising), Bedelia Du Maurier, Jack Crawford, Mason Verger, Freddie Lounds
Additional Tags:	Inspired by Lady and the Tramp (1955), Lady & The Tramp AU, Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Omega Verse, Alpha/Omega, Animal Ears, Alpha Will Graham, Omega Hannibal Lecter, Crack Treated Seriously, Canis Sapiens, Alternative Evolution, (Lady & The Tramp meets Planet Of The Apes), Cattus Sapiens, Arranged Breeding, Past Abuse, Past Neglect, Getting to Know Each Other, Sharing a Bed, Attraction, Mental Health Issues, (MH of minor characters), Kissing, inexperienced Hannibal, Loss of Virginity, Knot Denial, Revelations, Alternate History, discussions of history, Falling In Love, incarceration, Escape, Cruelty, Rescue, Disappointment, (humans suck), Kidnapping, (but like... a good kidnapping), Mating Cycles/In Heat, Bonding, Mating Bond, Mating Bites, Knotting, Mpreg, Happy Ending, can be read as traditional or multisex omega, do not copy to another site, Podfic Welcome
Language:	English
Series:	Part 62 of ABO/Omegaverse Fics by TigerPrawn, Part 25 of Tiger's Hannigram AU fics
Collections:	#SummertimeSlick
Stats:	Published: 2018-07-31 Completed: 2019-08-25 Words: 20,573 Chapters: 3/3

The Stray

by TigerPrawn

Summary

When Will meets pampered pet Hannibal whilst he is scrounging for scraps, he has no idea that their lives will become so completely entwined and that it will change both of their realities.

Notes

For #SummertimeSlick - scenting and Crack
This idea for this started off as a kind of cracky cute one shot where our boys have animal ears. But... yeah, my brain happened and now it is a dystopian future (if you're a dog!) and that might be the least crazy thing about it.

I normally write everything up front before posting, but I had a few deadlines and surgery so this one got pushed to the backburner and the rest of it is currently in note form. I will be finishing and updating as soon as I get the chance.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Will's ears pricked up when he heard the sound of gossip as he passed by the fence.

About two hours earlier, he'd snuck through the security perimeter that enclosed a large part of the city. The rich part. Kept resplendent and ignorant in a literal bubble. He hated the place. Pristine and sleek. Clean, to the point of sterility. It wasn't natural and certainly no way for a Canis Sapien to live. And yet, live here they did as was confirmed by the chatter the otherside of the fence.

Will only came here on refuse day, knowing that the servants would be placing the disposal units outside for the automated drones to collect. The trick was to time it right - get to the good ones before the drones did, bust them open for the goods and then scarper before someone came to attend to the mess. Or worse, the Licence Enforcer was called. But Will was slight, quick, and smart - all the attributes necessary to do this and not get caught.

So far.

This particular house he had been near before. There were two Canis here and he had plundered their bins several times. One of them had some recurring gastric issue and the excess pills were often discarded. Will had hoped this was the case today because those pills were great for stomach upsets and one of the pups in the allotment was pretty sick. He'd been lucky, the pills were there but now his attention was captured as he rounded this next house - a new Canis on this block.

Gossip was always interesting in these well-heeled neighbourhoods if just for the triviality of it. Fancy pets who wanted to chatter endlessly about this or that - what new bejewelled collar they had been given, or what spa their owners have taken them to. How would such pampered idiots survive in the real world? It was such a joke, Will spent a lot of time in these neighbourhoods rolling his eyes. Not that he was above raiding their bins for the refined scraps of such pedigree fools.

Once, it had made him sad - for them. But at some point he'd had to accept that there was only so much he could do about the situation. There was nothing he could do to help them.

His ears twitched forward, taking in more of the conversation as he passed by, slowing.

A soft and accented voice was speaking.

“It didn’t hurt really, but she’s never struck me before.” The Canis Sapien on the other side of the fence lamented. It got Will’s hackles up. How did these idiots not understand they were still imprisoned no matter how well they were treated? Much less when their owners inevitably turned on them. Homo Sapiens could not be trusted.

“Don’t take it too seriously, not at a time like this,” a comforting voice chimed in as Will moved closer to the fence, angling himself to see through the slats. Three Canis Sapiens sat in the garden, one cross-legged on the floor and the two older sitting in the low chairs designed for their kind - to keep them always seated lower than the Homo Sapiens. Those were the two from the house he'd just visited, clearly having a social call with the new pup neighbour.

“A time like this?” The younger one asked, looking up at his elders. As he did so, his scent wafted on the breeze - a delicate but tangy thing, like blossom and citrus. Will wasn't sure the last time he'd come across such a beautiful omegan scent. Especially amongst the pampered, with their shampoos and lotions. The fresh air of the garden seemed to have lessened any products the humans made this one use, leaving it crisp like an citrus grove.

The other one, his hair a white blonde and his ears short, sharp points, continued kindly - “she’s expecting a baby, Hannibal.”

“Oh.” The adolescent - Hannibal - replied, before his brow furrowed. “What’s a baby?”

The two older Canis looked at each other for a moment, that uncomfortable realisation between them that they had to explain reproduction to this kid. Will snickered.

“It’s… it’s what the humans call their pups.” The white haired one replied, his expression was that of someone desperately hoping that they didn’t need to explain any further.

This was more amusing than Will could have even imagined. He had to be of a similar age to the pampered pet and yet he’d grown up knowing all about sex and pups. He knew plenty of pups when he was younger, he’d even helped some of the parents evade the Licence Enforcers when he’d grown. It was amazing how sheltered these pets were. Frustratingly so.

He trotted to the gate and looked through the bars there. Will had to admit the omega was beautiful. He had an athletic build, and long fluffy ears that pooled at his shoulders. Will could imagine him easily with them pulled back and tied, revealing more of the handsome and well structured face. Oh yes, this omega was a very refined pedigree, that much was clear. When he spoke the accent cemented Will's immediate thought that he would be of some purebred lineage no doubt dating back to the days when humans first enslaved Canis and Cattus. Not that they called it slavery, Will's lips twitched into a sneer at the thought.

Perhaps it was the scent or the ridiculous and amusing conversation, but Will found himself slipping through the gate and daring to get a better vantage point. He hadn't intended it, he'd meant to walk off. But as he could hear the older Canis talking to the the fancy pup about how adorable human children were, Will clenched his jaw.

"A cute little bundle of-"

Will cut off the other Canis with a sharp tongue - "a cute little bundle of trouble. They scratch, pinch, pull ears. Ah but hey any Canis can take that, right? It's what they do to your happy home. You think you're happy now, you think they love you. But-"

"Wait a damn minute." The silver haired Canis cut him off and Will huffed. "Who are you to barge in anyway? Don't listen to this..." he waved his hand as though Will weren't even worth a derogatory name. "He's just a stray, pay him no mind." He scowled but clearly didn't want to physically do anything about the stray's presence.

"The voice of experience is what I am. Just wait till Junior gets here." He was snarling now and couldn't even help it. The omega's eyes were wide at him and Will almost wanted to stop but if anything it made him even more angry that these house pets were so damn stupid. "How do you think strays become strays?"

“Oh.” Hannibal’s face was drawn in a pained realisation that actually made Will feel bad for being so salty. He clenched his jaw knowing full well he only spoke the truth.

“Don’t listen to him.” The silver one shot him a glare. “You should leave, we’ve no need for mongrels and their radical ideas.”

Will huffed a laugh to cover his annoyance. Damn uppity pets. He started to the gate but then turned back to the young Canis. “I’m done here anyway, but just remember this puppy, a human heart only has so much room for love and affection. When a baby moves in, the pet moves out.”

Hannibal shook his head, frowning deeper. “No, that’s not true. I… I have a license. They gave me a collar - the greatest honour a human can bestow. A badge of faith and respectability.” Hannibal stated, haughtily.

Will barked a laugh. “Wow. It’s so entrenched you don’t even get it do you? You’re a slave. They may not ask you to work, but you are still here at their whim. Not by choice. You’re not free.” He growled the last, before he pushed the gate wide and left without deigning to close it.

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Will took to the streets with his usual pace and wariness, keeping to the shadows until he was back through the perimeter. Across the derelict land that had once brimmed with industry, and into his own neighbourhood. This rundown end of the city that housed the poor and strays alike. There were some humans there - sick and disenfranchised, those that other humans decided not to help.

Will took from his satchel a pack of dried spaghetti. It was passed its use by date, which likely was why it had been thrown out, but the pack was undamaged. There had been two and he would eke the other out himself, but this one...

He trotted into the rundown tenement building he was passing and up to the fourth floor. Tony was likely asleep, so he pushed the broken door open and left the spaghetti just inside. Tony was a human who had been living there about a year, Will had helped him settle in, as much as he could. The man was broken - he had no family and a failed business. When he started to deteriorate mentally he was abandoned by humans. Will on the other hand was happy to hear stories of when he ran his own restaurant. It was talking to Tony - some of the things the man said about Canis - that made Will realise things weren't as he had thought.

The pampered pets probably knew even less. No idea where they came from and what had been done to them.

As Will went back out to the street and continued on his way, he tried to quell his anger at the thought. It wasn't like he'd never run into dumb pets before, he wasn't sure why it was bothering him so much this time. Why he was so bothered by the fate of some pampered omega?

Will shook the thoughts from his head, what the hell did it matter if they were kept as pets? What were the other options anyway? Starving half the time, sleeping rough or near as, trying to keep warm. But one day he’d take off to the other city. He’d planned to for the longest time, but there always seemed to be some other stray needing help. Needing food or shelter. Some poor sucker thrown out on the street with no idea how to survive and an expired license that would get them picked up and impounded now their human had lost interest in them.

It brought him back to the pup he had met today. Such different lives they had lead and yet it might be only a matter of time before that fool was on the streets too. Once the baby human arrived and his owner’s interest in him was lost.

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The stray's words stayed with Hannibal.

He had spent long months as his mistress's belly grew, terrified that he would be thrown out on the streets. He had no idea how to live without the care and comfort of Homo Sapiens.

His concerns had gone from hoping that his owners found a suitably pedigreed alpha to whelp him once his heats hit peak fertility, to hoping that they didn't revoke his license.

But it all turned out to be a worry over nothing, as Jimmy and Brian had reassured. When the baby arrived, it was strange to have another creature in the house that was also reliant on the humans as much as he - more so even. But she was so tiny and helpless, he couldn't help his omegan instinct to give her care too. They called her Mischa and sometimes she smiled and gurgled at him.

His owners continued to be kind, the baby grew day by day and Hannibal knew that he himself was getting closer to them choosing an alpha for him.

Hannibal had worried about nothing. They wouldn't decide to breed him if they had no intention of keeping him. They would be such a happy family - the humans and their baby, Hannibal and his litter - until they reached an age to go to The Institute as all young ones did once weaned. There they would be raised as befitted their pedigree before finding loving homes of their own as he had. That was the way for Canis Sapiens and he couldn't ask for better!

Until one fateful day.

Hannibal's owners were going away to visit with the owners of a pedigree alpha they were hoping to match Hannibal with. Mischa was several months old, she could sit and pull sweetly at his ears as she babbled at him - and Hannibal had every intention of keeping her safe whilst the humans were away.

Then Aunt Murasaki arrived.

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Hannibal ran, on and on. His vision blurred with the tears that were rolling with little effort from his eyes.

The mask cut into his face and he bared his teeth behind it. It covered his nose and mouth, almost his entire face. A muzzle specifically made for Canis Sapiens, that he had only heard tales of - horror stories told in the dead of night at the Institute. He never thought for one moment he would wear one.

When Aunt Murasaki had arrived her ways had been cold and strict, but not unkind. Not until the manipulations of the Cattus Sapiens she brought with her.

Bee and Delia were sleek and sour, haughty and cruel - they teased him mercilessly. He did not rise to it, which seemed to anger them all the more.

Hannibal put up with it, knowing it to be temporary, and trying hard to be the good Canis he was supposed to be for his humans. So he did not rise to it when they pulled his ears; when they stole his treats; when they locked him in the pantry… or when he saw them crush underfoot a fledgling that had fallen into the garden.

But when he'd seen them slink towards Mischa, who sat drinking her milk bottle and gurgling at them happily, he had a bad feeling. The constant provocations had not been aimed at her so far, but Hannibal could suddenly see the cruel glint in their eyes. She was his weakness and they had made him the subject of their cruelty.

He had walked over slowly as they made a show of cooing over her - the first time they had paid her any kind of attention.

"Don't hurt her." His words had been a plea and a warning. They had turned and smirked at him in unison.

"Whyever would we hurt her?"

"Silly pup."

They turned back to Mischa then and Bee looked as though she intended to pick the baby up. Hannibal's jaw clenched, and he had become rigid - not wanting to do anything either way to upset this situation.

The upset had come anyway. Bee had snatched the bottle away from Mischa, her smirk widening. Mischa had immediately wailed her unhappiness and Aunt Murasaki's footsteps were suddenly thundering towards the nursery.

In a flash, during which Hannibal had remained frozen in his uncertainty, Bee had spilled the milk all over Mischa and the floor. Delia laughed and took the bottle, splashing the remnants on Hannibal before crying out.

"Quick mistress, quick! That terrible dog."

"The terrible dog is stealing from the baby."

The two of them grinned widely at him as Hannibal stood, blinking and terrified. After a moment he started towards Mischa, wanting to sooth her tears but then Murasaki arrived and was on him. Yelling at him not to touch the baby, hitting him with a book she had in hand, until he was forced away from Mischa and out of the room. The door was slammed shut on him and as Mischa's tears were hushed by Aunt Murasaki, the only remaining sound was the snickering of the Cattus.

The muzzle had come then.

A day and a night he had stayed that way, locked in the conservatory and not allowed back into the main house even to sleep. He was fed plain food, not his usual fair, and no treats.

When the door had opened, he looked up in the hopes of seeing his owners, but instead it was the Cattus Sapiens that taunted him.

“They will be home soon.” He had muttered under his breath, attempting to comfort himself.

Delia must have heard because she laughed - musical cruelty.

“Oh yes dear they will. And they are bringing an Enforcer with them.”

“Mistress told them everything.” Bee hissed through a smile. “How you cannot be trusted with the baby.”

“You have to go.” Bee nodded. “Either the Enforcer will take you or… Maybe you should run?” She sounded almost concerned, but Hannibal knew it was false - he knew his owner’s would believe him over the Cattus. But even so they terrified him.

Delia nodded. “Oh yes, little doggy, you should run!” She opened the conservatory door into the garden and smiled sweetly.

So Hannibal had ran. He would return once his owners did, surely they would fix all this?

He didn't realise how far he had gone, and what danger he might be in, until he stopped to look around and it was clear he was far beyond the city perimeter.

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Will looked up at the commotion. A couple of trouble makers he knew, those that helped themselves before other Canis, were shouting at the other end of the alley.

It took Will a moment to realise that they taunting someone - a figure huddled next to the large bins that were never emptied any more. Perhaps they’d hidden there to unsuccessfully escape. He might not have intervened - just another pissing contest over turf - but then he caught a glimpse of their victim and realised it wasn’t another street pup, it was the pampered omega he had met many months before.

Something in him boiled up. All those random thoughts he’d had since their meeting, and now seeing him attacked like this - Will growled and his hackles tightened and stood on end.

"Hey." Will called out, grabbing the attention of the mongrels. "You want to come for me instead?" He barked at them. They puffed themselves up but remained further back. His reputation held a lot of weight and he was perfectly able to back it up if it came to blows. They certainly knew that.

One of them stepped towards the pet again, an eye still on Will for his reaction. Will took another step.

"Touch my omega and I will rip out your throat." He rumbled deep in his chest, exuding as much bullshit alpha aggression as he could. What clinched it though was the omega's answering whine at his words - to the interlopers it clearly sealed their claim on each other. And no one was surely fool enough to come between an alpha and omega.

These two were no exception, muttering curses under their breath as they stomped from the alley like petulant children - all the while keeping a wary eye on Will.

Will took in a deep breath and let it out heavily. This wasn't how he'd planned to spend his evening, and yet now he seemed to be responsible for some delicate little omega. He made his way over to where the omega - Hannibal, he reminded himself - still hid and stood before him, reaching a hand down.

"Come on, you shouldn't be walking around these parts in the dark. Let's get you to the Enforcer on the perimeter... you've got a licence, he'll take you home." Will grumbled. He hated going near Enforcers and only ever did it to distract them whilst other Canis evaded capture.

When the omega looked up with sorrowful eyes, Will's jaw clenched.

"Who put that on you?" He asked, anger and pity brimming at the sight of the muzzle.

"She... she thought I'd attacked the baby, she thought I'd hurt the baby..." He looked like he might continue, but equally like he might cry, so Will just nodded, trying to make clear Hannibal didn't need to say anything more.

"Come on... let me help." He flexed his hand again until the omega took it and gingerly stood.

"Will reached around him and, all too expertly, unbuckled the mask until it fell away and dropped to the floor.

The omega's skin was a little raw from tears and the rubbing of the mask. Will stroked his thumb over some of the worst of it.

"I might have some salve for-"

The omega shook his head. "I don't want to be any bother-"

Will cut him off with a snorted laugh, "oh, you've already been that."

The omega's face broke into a demure smile as he blushed. Will felt butterflies in his belly.

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It had taken Will a while to coax the whole story from him as he started to walk the omega to a slightly safer part of town. And in some respects it was even worse than Will had assumed. To live with humans was bad enough, but -

"Say no more." Will shook his head. "I get the whole picture. Aunts, Cattus, muzzles. Well... That's what comes with living with humans."

He took a glance and could see the omega about to defend his owners, so he changed the subject - he had no interest in debating this with a pampered pet.

"Have you eaten? Uh, Hannibal isn't it?" Will was sure the name was memorable enough for him to have not gotten wrong, and yet the omega puffed himself up as though indignant.

"Only my family, and Jimmy and Brian call me Hannibal." It wasn't so much a correction as it seemed to be an uncertainty over what he should allow Will to call him.

"Huh. Ok." Will shrugged. "What do you want me to call you?"

The omega looked put on the spot at a question he had clearly not expected. "Um... my family told me that when they introduce me to an alpha I should introduce myself by my full pedigree name." There was a slight frown at the word alpha and Will knew it was yet more uncertainty - Will clearly wasn't the sort of alpha he'd ever considered he would be introducing himself to.

"Yeah? What's your full name?" Will couldn't help the tease in his voice. The omega was weirdly adorable. It was like he lived in his own little bubble, a little suit that kept him from being seen by the rest of the world. That much Will could see clearly - which obviously made the omega feel exposed in some way.

Hannibal cleared his throat. "Count Hannibal Lecter VIII"

Will couldn't help the bark of laughter that jumped from his throat. After pulling back to a chuckle he said - "Wow, well... that was even more pretentious than I assumed it would be."

The omega reddened with a blush that didn't hide the anger he had clearly schooled himself to control. Or been schooled. He had so many emotions and yet kept a cool and aloof demeanour unless rattled. He must have been trained at an expensive institute.

"I'm sorry." Will apologised and held up his hands, smiling all the same. "We're from very different backgrounds. I'm sure you've made plenty of assumptions about me too."

The omega looked away at that and they continued to walk in silence for a few minutes before Will rejoined -

"So, what *do* I call you?"

"Hannibal." The omega finally allowed quietly, and Will didn't have a witty retort for that.

"Okay Hannibal." Will smiled. "I'm Will."

Hannibal let out a light laugh that surprised Will. He looked over at the omega and enjoyed the weirdly devious smile on his face as he said, "in my head, I've just been calling you *the stray*."

Will huffed a laugh before taking Hannibal's elbow to guide him towards a side alley from the one they were in.

"This way… it's a shortcut back to your neighbourhood. But I know a guy, we can grab you some food on-" Will started but Hannibal froze, stopping dead in his tracks and making Will stumble.

"I… I don't think I want to go back. Not right now. Aunt Murasaki and the Cattus-"

Will nodded and cut in. “It’s ok… I get it… But…” he looked around him and then back at Hannibal. “These streets are not the place for you. Pampered pet like yourself wouldn’t last five minutes, even without the muzzle.”

Will thought for a moment, hating where his brain was taking him because he really didn’t want to be responsible for some ridiculous house pet, and yet… was there another option?

“When are your owners home?” Will asked gruffly, begrudgingly even.

That made Hannibal look clearly unsure and maybe a little upset. “Tomorrow. They went to see a prospective alpha so I can-”

Will held up his hand. “I don’t need to know the gory details of your arranged knock-up.” He couldn’t help the note of distaste in his voice or in his expression.

Where he had before looked upset, Hannibal now scowled at him. “You don’t know anything about my life… or my owners! I’m sure they will find me a perfectly respectable match who will give me-”

“Perfectly respectable pups.” Will shook his head and let out a light laugh. “Sweetheart, you have the world all wrong. Don’t you want to be free? Don’t you want to choose for yourself who will father your pups? Maybe even someone you like? Someone you might see for more than the three days of your heat that it will take them to whelp you?”

He was surprised to see the anger in Hannibal’s face. “You don’t understand my world. Can’t you see that I’m happy? I want this! Even if it’s as distasteful to you as your lifestyle is to me!” He started to stomp off.

“Now, wait just a second.” Will growled, catching up with him and keeping stride. “Firstly, this isn’t me judging you. I’m trying to help you. I… I just want you to see your situation for what it really is before you decide you are happy with it. And secondly,” he grabbed Hannibal’s arm and pulled him to a stop so that they were both glowering at each other. “Secondly, we’ve already established that you know nothing about my life or my situation so don’t start judging me either!”

Hannibal huffed. “And yet, you presume to know my situation, what it is to be a pet?”

“Hannibal…” Will spoke softly, he looked down and away, not able to meet the omega’s eyes as he admitted - “I used to be a pet.”

When he looked up Hannibal was frowning at him as though he had spoken gibberish. Will sighed and tilted his head as he smoothed back some of the hair that grew long at the nape of his neck. The little gasp from Hannibal was enough to know that he accepted the evidence before his eyes - the two inch long, deep and angry scar left by the collar that used to sit there.

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They had walked in silence for a few long minutes, before Will said -

"I'll take you to my place for the night, then we can work it out from there. At least you'll have a roof over your head until your owner's get back."

There was a note of hissed disdain in the word *owner* that made Hannibal feel terrible. It had never occurred to him before that strays hadn't always been strays - even though Will had intimated as much the first time they met. Of course, many were born strays to stray parents, but not all. They had to come from somewhere. But it had never settled in his comprehension that any of them had been pets at any time in the same sense that he was.

Hannibal nodded, grateful but unsure what to say. Until of course he said the wrong thing.

"Um, do strays live in houses?"

Will's lip curled into a slight snarl as he looked across at Hannibal before answering gruffly. "Some. I do, kinda. Some don't - they live on the streets. Either because they are unlucky or... some of them, some that had owners, are broken. They find it hard to live inside houses, or with others. They need to be alone and in open spaces."

Hannibal swallowed. He really couldn’t marry what Will was telling him with his own experience of humans.

"I... I can't imagine what anyone would do that would get them thrown out of their homes. I just don't see how a human-"

"You don't huh?" Will cut him off and turned on him, stopping the omega in his tracks. "You still think everything is pretty flower boxes and fine cuts of meat. You're deluded." The alpha shook his head.

"I didn't mean... I-" Hannibal started, hating that he'd put his foot in it again with his clear lack of understanding anything beyond his pampered life. He put his hand gently on Will's arm. "What happened to you? Why are you a stray."

Will scoffed and then looked at him, seeming to lose some of his ire when he realised the concern in Hannibal's eyes was genuine.

"As with most mongrels, my parents were strays, but I don't know their stories. I was caught by the License Enforcers when I was a pup. They took me to a rehoming shelter and after a while a man came and adopted me - Jack. He was a private detective, trained me up - we have better sense of smell than humans. Especially alphas." He shrugged and Hannibal was unsure what to do with the sadness he could see in Will's eyes. Will had enjoyed his life, probably even become attached to his human. "Then, well then he met Bella. She was sweet, but then she got pregnant and everything changed. Jack decided to give up his business and get a steady job in security and... I was suddenly superfluous. Not considered to be a family friendly *pet*." He spat the last word with disdain.

"You ran away?" Hannibal asked, thinking of his own rash behaviour that had landed him here.

Will huffed a laugh. "If only I'd been that smart. Nah, see sweetheart, I was an idiot - like you. I didn't get it back then, I thought we were friends, not equals sure. I was his pet but also his colleague. It did not for one moment occur to me that..." He shook his head as though he couldn't believe he had put such trust into a human. "He gave me away to some guy he knew, Mason. Fucking evil piece of shit." Will drew a sharp breath. "Maybe Jack knew, maybe he didn't. Maybe he didn't care. He ran Canis fights… would just keep us chained up and starve us until we were ready to turn on each other and people paid to watch and bet on us. My collar was too tight… cut right into me, that's the scar. At least until the weight started to drop off. I… I still don't know where I got the strength, but when I was untied to be taken to fight, I got away. I just ran and ran until I collapsed. Somehow I was here," he indicated the broken down buildings around them. "Other Canis helped me. Been here since, helping others."

Will took a breath and Hannibal didn't know what to say. It was impossible that someone made Canis fight each other for sport. That couldn't possibly be, but why would Will lie?

Will shook his head. "I was with Jack three years and he couldn't even look me in the eyes as I begged him to let me stay with him." The words were growled as though Will were angry at himself for having begged, Hannibal was sure he wouldn't do the same now. "I'd been on the streets as a pup, adjusting wasn't hard, and I learned a lot when I was a working with Jack. So since then I've been trying to help others that find themselves on the street. And help them get to-"

Will cut himself off and gave Hannibal a sharp look as though he realised how freely he had been speaking considering how little he had said before.

"Anyways, just another sob story your highness." Will smirked, pulling back his bravado.

Hannibal frowned, realising his hand was still on Will's arm he removed it slowly. "I'm sorry that happened to you but-"

"Oh kiddo, there's no but." Will laughed and shook his head. "You still don't get it. We aren't shit to them. You still think our situations are so different? Do you think that once your owners hear what has happened while they've been gone they'll keep you? Nah, those Cattus were right, you'll be off to the shelter. If you're lucky you'll end up with another nice family, until they get bored of you too."

"I don't... I don't want a new family." Hannibal narrowed his eyes, wanting to hate Will for his nasty words. But he *had* been about to protest, as Will likely assumed. He had been about to say 'but that would never happen to me'. Maybe Will had thought that once too.

Will chuckled and started to walk away, leaving Hannibal to fall into step with him.

"The only family you can rely on is your own. I mean, your own flesh and blood. Those pups that you're so eager to have sired on you. That they'll send off to a finishing Institute as soon as they are weaned and get a nice little paycheck for them."

Hannibal felt the blood drain from his face. Another thing that hadn't occurred to him. Not really. Put like this it was a hard truth to acknowledge. They wouldn't be sent right away he

knew that but it had never really sunk in what that meant. He had never really aligned it with his sparse and sad memories of his own mother. Would they send all of them?

"They... they might let me keep one." Hannibal offered weakly.

Will's voice was low and gentle when he replied, none of the cutting bitterness of before. "Sweetheart, you could have a litter of two or three, maybe four. And you get to keep one? Are you going to choose? Are the humans? Will you be able to decide a favourite amongst your own flesh and blood? Will the humans just want to keep the one that is the prettiest, or most obedient?"

Hannibal trembled at the words, tears stinging the corners of his eyes. He came to a stop and Will did a moment later. The alpha turned and pulled Hannibal close, his nose falling to the alpha's scent gland. The strong scent was calming and comforting, as Will seemed to have intended.

"I'm sorry Hannibal. I hate that you're upset. But it's best for you to know... to understand the truth, that-"

"We're slaves." Hannibal finished on a sob.

*

Will felt terrible. His words had clearly upset Hannibal, but it would be equally cruel to shield the omega from the truth.

Hannibal had been quiet the whole rest of the walk to his place. Through the alleys, out into the little wasteland where Will lived. He had a little shack to himself, although it was no more than a makeshift bed in a shed, it had a vegetable patch surrounding it. This whole area used to be allotments before the sprawl of the city overtook it and then died - as far as he could tell. Now it was just another abandoned area beyond the perimeter of the city. The Licence Enforcers didn't even venture so far from the city, they would be terrifyingly outnumbered by non humans.

"It's not much... but it's mine." Will said by way of a welcome as he pushed open the half wedged door. It then ground to a halt up against his tiny table, leaving only enough room for them to squeeze in one at a time.

He went in first, turning on the little lamp on the shelf above his bed, so that Hannibal could see as he proceeded.

"You like tomatoes?" Will asked as the omega entered cautiously. As he waited for a reply, he watched Hannibal's eyes slowly close as he took a breath. Will flushed, realising his concentrated scent lingering in his tiny home was soothing to the omega. Will cleared his throat - "I grow my own and can make...uh, pasta. You want pasta?"

Despite being on home turf, literally, he felt somewhat vulnerable - like he was rolling over and exposing his belly.

As the omega's eyes adjusted to the dim light, Will was surprised to see his smile brighten. He looked almost excitedly at Will.

"This is lovely! This is all yours?"

Will frowned. How could a pampered pet think this hovel was anything in comparison to what he was used to?

"Uh, yeah..."

"I only... I have a bed in the family room. It's... comfortable, pretty… It has lace trims... But... I..."

It had never occured to Will that rich human pets might not have their own rooms. He hadn't had one with Jack, he'd had something a little similar to this - a kennel in the yard.

"You can stay as long as you like." Will found himself blurting quite unintentionally. He had planned to return the omega to his home the next day but as Hannibal's scent started to fill the enclosed space and mingle sweetly with his own, Will's resolve dissipated.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gets to know Will better, and the history of the canis sapiens...

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in posting XD
This fic is now completed and the final chapter will be posted tomorrow - 25/08/19

Will took in a deep breath and scented the omega, his resultant exhale was a rumbled purr.

He blinked his eyes open. The omega was so close, so tempting. Will scurried back on the bed so fast he fell onto the floor with a thud.

“Will?” The sound must have woken Hannibal and Will winced, both at the pain in his ass from the fall, and at looking like an idiot.

The night before came back to him. They’d eaten and then talked for so long they were starting to nod off. Will had insisted Hannibal have his bed but when he had said he would sleep outside with some blankets, Hannibal insisted that the bed was big enough to share.

It wasn’t, not really. And Will wasn’t quite sure why he had agreed to the omega's clearly innocently meant request.

Either way they woke with Hannibal pressed against the wall, and Will pressed against Hannibal, his face ensconced under one of Hannibal’s fluffy, floppy ears. Until he reeled from the bed.

“I fell,” He said dumbly and winced again.

Hannibal blinked, not yet quite awake, and then looked away, as though that was the polite thing to do, whilst Will clambered to his feet.

"I'll find us something for breakfast," Will said gruffly, clearing his throat before quickly leaving the shed. He took a deep breath once outside, a breath not filled with omega.

Not that it was a terrible scent to have in his nostrils, and lingering all over him. The problem was that it *wasn't* terrible. He'd never really wanted for an omega in his life. He’d had his

experiences here and there, mutual fun really, but never had scented an omega and felt the way Hannibal made him feel.

Hannibal wasn't like any omega he'd ever known. And it wasn't his snobbishness, Will had dealt with plenty of pups like that. Thrown out when the owners got bored, or started a family, or a million other reasons that meant the canis were treated as expendable. He helped plenty of them settle or move on to the other city. Those not too scarred, one way or the other, that they would just rather live alone in the tenements. Hannibal wasn't like any of those, hadn't reached that point. He'd been chased off rather than thrown out, and if Will helped him home, his family might be happy to be reunited. Stranger things had happened.

But it wasn't that either. There was something about Hannibal's innocence that felt temporary. Not that he was putting it on, but that he had been brainwashed like so many pups in the institute, like Will had been himself to a degree. The real Hannibal hadn't emerged yet - hadn't *become*. But the way he had made the realisation the night before about their being slaves had felt like a spark of something - and that wasn't even the whole story! He had sobbed the word, but there was something fierce and dangerous in his eyes, something Will wasn't even sure Hannibal knew he had in him.

Just thinking about it made Will's blood run hot.

That was the omega he could scent. A formidable beast that had been brainwashed and subjugated, and the homo sapiens were probably all the luckier for it.

Will let out a shaky breath and then breathed in again, scenting the fresh bread across the way and being relieved by the new scent. He started towards the family that lived on the other side of the allotment, he'd brought them medicine in the past and played with the pups often, they always would spare him a crust.

*

Hannibal wasn't sure where Will had gone, but knew he'd be back. He felt safe and warm in the alpha's company and perhaps more trusting than he should be. It had been made clear at the Institute that a canis' trust and loyalty should be to their humans alone, that was the way of things.

Hannibal thought about that as he fingered his collar, gently easing it open and taking it off. He placed it on Will's shelf and went outside to the small pale of water he'd seen there. It was clean and he used it to freshen up.

His thoughts drifted to Mischa. She usually consumed his mornings - playing with her whilst breakfast was made. He'd often spend long lengths of the day looking after her like she was his own. If he were allowed to use the kitchen, like a human, then he might have cooked for her too. He shook the thought from his head. The Lecters were wonderful people, but he was sure they would not have a canis in their kitchen, such a thing was unheard of.

Hannibal's thoughts were interrupted by the scuff of steps over the rough dirt, heralding Will's return. He looked up and couldn't help but smile at the alpha, bearing bread in his hands. He was sure that Will blushed as he offered a crust.

As they sat eating the fresh bread that Will had brought for breakfast, Hannibal wondered if he should ask Will more about everything he seemed to know about their kind, He clearly knew a lot more than Hannibal had ever been aware of but he was almost afraid to ask.

There was something inside him that felt almost like pain, but wasn't. Something hard and sharp. An emotion he couldn't name. But it rose in his belly every time he thought about what Will had said, about them being no more than slaves to the homo sapiens.

He should feel fear, he was sure, if he believed it to be true. And whilst he found himself trusting Will, there was no fear there. Just this sharpness. Like teeth.

“Are you alright?” Will asked, the slightest edge of concern to his gruff words.

Hannibal brought himself back to the moment and pulled on a practiced and simpering smile before realising he didn’t need to. He let it drop to something more natural and then gave a dismissive shake of his head, his ears moving with the motion and - he noted - catching Will’s eye.

“I was… just thinking. My family will be back soon, and I don’t want to go back," Hannibal said, realising his words as Will's perked forward, alert with interest. "Today, I mean. I don't want to go back until my family are there and I can explain everything."

Will grunted and gave a nod, looking down at the scrap of bread he had left in his hand.

"I could… You can stay here tonight, spend the day with me if you like?" The words were not friendly, but the offer seemed genuine.

"Yes," Hannibal smiled, "I'd like that."

Will gave no real reaction and yet Hannibal could sense that he was pleased with the response, that much seemed clear from his scent.

Hours later Hannibal couldn't help but continually think of his family. As much as he wanted to be there for Mischa, it wasn't a case of missing his luxuries but being suddenly aware of them. Of course it had been strange to him that Will had his own space, something Hannibal was not afforded in his family home, but he couldn't be blind to everything he did have. Food, warmth, clothing, water from a faucet. Basic things that some of these canis didn't have. Some had never had.

And Will? Hannibal began to understand his disdain for canis like himself. Pampered and unaware. They went from home to home in this wilderness, sheds like Will's. Then into some of the tenements, as Will checked on families that had been born there, canis and cattus that had been discarded by humans, and even a few humans themselves. Will made lists of the things everyone needed, medication and supplies - no luxuries - with a promise to get them as soon as he could.

It was wearing late into the afternoon and all they'd had since the bread was some fruit from one of the trees that seemed to be treated as public property. Will seemed perfectly used to

this but Hannibal's stomach had started to growl, embarrassingly, and he found himself apologising.

He was surprised by Will's comforting smile, when up until then he seemed to not have much regard for the omega trailing him around as he made his rounds.

“It’s okay, I have dinner all planned,” Will smiled softly, disarmingly, and pointed at the last tenement.

Inside, it was a mess, like the rest. Though even less occupants in here so it felt utterly abandoned and some of it was collapsing. Will lead him through a clearly tried and tested path to a door that was slightly ajar.

The smell coming from inside was amazing and made Hannibal’s stomach growl all the more. When Will pushed the door open enough to enter, he was greeted by a fond voice.

“Will! Just in time. Spaghetti, plenty for you…” The man inside paused as Hannibal started in after Will. He turned a friendly smile, beaming almost, to Hannibal, “And your friend.”

Will mumbled an introduction between Hannibal and the human - Tony - and Hannibal didn't miss his blush.

"Come!" Tony said, leading them through to the upturned crate the man clearly used as a table. "I have to take some of this to my friend, so I will leave you in peace."

Tony winked at them and it was Hannibal's turn to blush, especially when he then nudged Will with a grin, “This is a pretty one, you take my advice and settle down with this one.”

The human was chuckling as he served up a big plate and placed it between them with two forks, “Here we go, the best in the house.”

Hannibal didn’t miss the soft smile Will gave Tony, as if pleased by his behaviour more so than his kindness and the food itself. Tony didn’t seem to notice, off in his own world as he took another plate, cracked as it was, and put another serve on there before heading out the door.

“Don’t mind him,” Will mumbled again, picking up a fork and poking at the pasta, “he’s just having a good day. They don’t happen that often.”

Hannibal frowned, the thought of the cheerful and generous man being unhappy awakened that sharp pain inside him.

“Is… Is he okay?”

Will let out a long, heavy sigh, finishing his mouthful of spaghetti before answering softly, not meeting Hannibal’s eye, “Not really. He’s… A bit broken. A lot of residents here are. But some little things can make him happy. He used to own his own restaurant, cooking makes him happy. I’ve had some pasta saved away, I brought some for him yesterday before I found you. It makes him happy to cook for others, and with you here…” Will trailed off.

“Thank you, Will. You’re… you’re not what I thought. You’re very thoughtful.”

Will huffed a laugh and looked at him then, a grin spreading across his face and the atmosphere lightening.

“Not such a rascal, huh?” Will teased.

Hannibal returned the grin, “I guess not.”

Hannibal picked up his own fork and began to eat in the comfortable silence that had settled between them.

When Will sucked up a piece of spaghetti that swung up and soiled his nose with sauce, Hannibal laughed. Will laughing back was a delight, and Hannibal’s stomach did flips as he suddenly imagined himself licking the sauce from Will’s nose… from his lips…

Hannibal tried to hide how flustered the unexpected thought made him, by forking more spaghetti into his mouth. As he munched and sucked the long pasta into his mouth he noticed Will doing the same until a piece pulled taut between them.

Hannibal blinked and Will held his eyes, an unreadable expression despite a face Hannibal had found quite expressive until then.

They were frozen in that moment, gazing at each other as the pasta cooled between them, before finally, the butterflies in Hannibal’s stomach became too much and he bit the pasta, letting Will take his share as he turned away.

There was something in the moment that Hannibal feel suddenly and unhappily submissive, so he looked back. Will blinked and bit his end too, letting the pasta drop back into the plate.

Hannibal let out a shuddering breath, feeling Will’s clear intent that he considered them equals.

“I guess you’re not what I thought either,” Will said, just above a whisper.

Hannibal let out a shallow breath and hoped that Will couldn’t smell the small flush of arousal the alpha’s gaze sent through him. Maybe he could, because he turned away, perhaps to save Hannibal’s blushes, and continued to eat the pasta in silence.

*

Will felt the omega’s laugh roll through him, it was such a glorious thing and Will found it pull a chuckle from him too. One that was warm and meaningful, not his usual snark.

Maybe it was the fact that the omega knew only a little of him that made Hannibal stop and study Will’s face, to work out if the laugh was genuine. It made Will smile and Hannibal demure.

Will hadn’t expected this.

They had eaten their fill at Tony's and when the man had returned from taking food to one of his neighbours, the three of them sat and talked. Tony remembering his days as a restaurateur as though he still were one. A little fiction that Will neither encouraged or corrected, whilst Hannibal looked to him for a cue on it.

On the walk home Will hadn't meant to take the scenic route. But he had, having to take hold of Hannibal's hand so the omega didn't lose his footing as they walked over the ruins of an old office block, that was now pretty much a field of wildflowers. In the setting sun it was beautiful, and whilst Will only took Hannibal's hand to support him, he couldn't deny how nice it felt.

And now they were back at Will's home, and as the omega turned away from him his scent drifted across the small space between them. In the tiny room, door closed and window shuttered, the scent was already, steadily, permeating everything around them. It was delicious.

Despite his reluctance for connections in the past; despite his low tolerance for puffed up house pets, Will felt incredibly drawn.

"Thank you Will… for dinner, and letting me stay… and for helping me understand." Hannibal spoke quietly.

Will nodded his acknowledgement. When Hannibal sat forward on the cot to rest his elbows on his knees, Will leaned forward too, his hand falling to the base of Hannibal's back with no thought.

"You… want me to take you home tomorrow?" Will asked gently. Part of him wondered if Hannibal would still ignore everything he had been told for the sake of the rich life. For as long as it lasted at least. Who knows, Hannibal might end up one of the lucky ones.

Hannibal let out a shuddering breath and nodded his head even as he shrugged. This was his only reply - uncertainty. And Will wanted to offer more, wanted to say that the omega could stay there with him forever, or he could help him leave the city as he had for so many others.

The thought of Hannibal leaving either way, stung.

"Don't worry about it right now." Will cooed, rubbing Hannibal's back and leaning forward to near whisper the words at Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal looked back at him, his eyes glassy but warm. Before Will had chance to react, the omega leaned into him and pressed their lips together.

*

Hannibal trembled as he kissed Will.

He'd had some experience with alphas, the short lived and often largely innocent dalliances of youth when he was in the Institute. But it had not prepared him for this moment. This reckless moment where he had acted on impulse and now had no idea what to do next.

He pulled back and watched as Will's expression went from shock to… a pleasant smile.

Hannibal's breath hitched when Will leaned in to kiss him further and he pulled back from him.

"I'm sorry, I… I don't have much experience…" Hannibal apologised, worried that Will wouldn't be pleased with him.

Will gave another of his soft chuckle's that made Hannibal's heart thrum. "You don't need to apologise Hannibal."

Will stroked a hand down the long fur of Hannibal's ear and he shuddered at the unfamiliar and intimate touch. And then Will retreated again, giving him space, Hannibal realised.

"You don't have to… Hannibal, I…" Will seemed to find it hard to express what it was he felt but the scent of his arousal was clear and that was all the encouragement Hannibal needed. He plucked up the nerve and moved quickly, swinging a leg over until he straddled Will's lap.

His breath was coming in pants and his heart thumping as he felt Will's hardness press against him.

Will winced, as though concerned at how clear his arousal was. So Hannibal kissed him again.

It was slow and sensual. Will taking the lead immediately, and Hannibal was glad of it. He mirrored the movements as Will slipped his tongue into his mouth. Groaning as he did the same until they were tasting each other.

He wanted more, he wanted Will deeper inside him, his hands fisting in Will's clothes and pulling them closer together. But it wasn't the kiss he needed deepened. He whined and on instinct began to grind himself on Will's lap.

After a few moments, Will broke the kiss, sitting back and panting as he rested his forehead against Hannibal's.

"Hannibal… are you… are you sure about this?"

Hannibal nodded fervently, "Please… alpha…"

Will groaned at the words and lifted Hannibal, hands under his rump, as he placed him on his back on the bed and lay over him.

"If we… If you go home and they realise…" He could hear the warning in Will's tone, see it in his eyes. He looked scared for Hannibal. And maybe he was right to be? There were many owners that might evict a pet who had been deflowered by the local stray.

"I don't care," Hannibal admitted breathlessly, shocking himself. He did care, he didn't want to lose his family, to lose Mischa. But, in that moment, he wanted this more. Wanted Will. Wanted this alpha. And the thought that he had never considered to want an alpha like this,

hurt. The thought that the alpha his family would arrange for him he expected to have no connection to like this was suddenly painful.

How could he have ever considered being with an alpha just for his heat? Just for pups? Just because his owners arranged it?

Hannibal whined again and pulled Will down into another kiss, wrapping his legs up around him so that Will slotted between them. His hard cock pressing against Hannibal's own through their layers. Hannibal shook as slick began to swell from him, wetting his clothing and scenting the air in a way that made Will shudder.

He savoured the reaction. Wanting to make Will shudder again and again. Wanting the alpha to want him.

"Do you want me Will?" Hannibal pulled back to ask, Will's eyes practically glazed with lust.

"Yes…" Will breathed out the word and began to nuzzle at Hannibal's neck, at his scent gland.

Hannibal felt the ache inside him growing alongside the pain he'd felt before. Something breaking apart in his chest and telling him this was so right even as warnings filled his mind.

He didn't care.

The ache spread from his chest down his body, between his thighs. A throbbing ache that he knew only Will could resolve.

"Please, alpha... Will…" Hannibal started trying to pull at Will's clothing, but in the narrow bed had little room.

Will gave a grunt and with a clear effort, forced himself from the bed. He started to quickly undress, Hannibal watching wide-eyed as he pulled off each layer until he was naked, his hard cock leaking and the scent of him all the more pungent.

Hannibal whimpered and rubbed his thighs together, trying to get some relief but only resulting in arousing himself more. Another wave of slick surged from him and both he and Will moaned in response.

And then Will was pulling at his clothes, undoing his fussy top before abandoning it to Hannibal's hands and starting on his pants. Hannibal half expected him to rip them off, but instead Will pulled them down gently, stroking against Hannibal's thighs as he went, his gaze deliberately avoiding everything he revealed.

Will moved back up, just as slowly pulling Hannibal's top off and leaving the omega naked and panting as he kneeled next to him.

"You're beautiful," Will muttered and then swallowed, his chest rising and falling at the same rate as Hannibal's.

Hannibal took hold of Will's hand and tugged at him until Will was back in the same position he'd been in before.

They stilled. Gazing into each other's eyes as they shared breaths between them, both their scents heavy in the air and mixing into one that felt right. Will's cock pressed against his slick entrance in a way that just *was* - not a tease just inevitability.

Hannibal wasn't sure what this was, perhaps the sort of attraction pups had mooned over in the Institute, the sort he had believed they would all find with their arranged alphas. But he now knew for sure that couldn't be true. He could never feel this way for anyone other than Will.

Hannibal's breath caught in his chest as Will gently slid into him.

He trembled and breathed out in little gasps. The look of bliss on Will's face making him feel ways he hadn't expected.

This was only ever meant for his arranged alpha, a means to an end to be bred. Not to *feel*.

Will began to move, rocking into him until he was buried to the hilt and growling against Hannibal's shoulder as he slowly pulled almost out and thrust back in.

When Will began to quicken his motions, grunting against Hannibal, the omega couldn't help but let out little huffs of pleasure. It was perfect. He hadn't ever imagined sex would be like this, but as Will thrust faster, rocking him into the bed, Hannibal could feel the pleasure pooling within him. Will was sparking something inside of him that was radiating throughout Hannibal's body and making him tremble with pleasure and need.

Hannibal clung to Will as their bodies pressed together, Will's mouth on his scent gland again. Instinct, Hannibal knew. But he wanted it, in that moment he wanted more. Wanted Will to sink in his teeth and claim him.

"Knot me, please alpha,"

"Hannibal," His name came out reverently, "I can't… you might… even without your heat you might…"

Hannibal whimpered, slowly nodding his understanding. And Will was right, he knew that, as much as he didn't want to admit it.

Will slowed, kissing him gently, soothingly.

They rocked slowly against each other and Hannibal let out a low moan. There was regret in there, a wish that they could have more. But there was also affection and arousal - two things he had come to feel keenly for Will in such a short time.

Will mouthed against his scent gland and the action did a lot to sooth, and more. Lulling Hannibal into a completely relaxed state, his body pliant and welcoming.

It felt like their love making lasted for hours. Part of Hannibal wanted to chastise his romanticism of it, how timeless it felt, but couldn't bring himself too. It was perfect, Will was perfect.

The alpha began to build his rhythm once more, though not the same hard thrusts. He was gentle and loving. Kissing Hannibal deeply and stroking his fingers over the omega's fluffy ears.

Hannibal whimpered again, feeling his pleasure mounting as Will moved perfectly within him - caressing some inner part of him that was radiating a satisfaction he'd never known before.

"Will," Hannibal whispered, breath stolen as he broke the kiss and closed his eyes, his climax suddenly washing over him and making his body shudder with pleasure, "Oh Will, alpha…" Hannibal's words were reverent cries as his cock throbbed between them, releasing his omegan come all over his stomach.

He watched as Will groaned and squeezed his eyes shut. As he thrust a few more times, slightly harder, slightly deeper - into Hannibal's constricting muscles.

"Oh… ung… Hannibal…" Will moaned his name and he could feel the alpha's knot pressing against him. He was sure, just for a moment, that Will was going to push it inside him and tie them as Hannibal had wanted. But then Will shuddered, coming deep inside Hannibal and wincing as he held himself there a moment, a pleasure for them both, before he pulled out.

Will sat back on his haunches, his cock still pulsing and spilling as he wrapped a fist around it, stroked it down to his knot and gripped.

Hannibal moved forward without hesitation, feeling the come inside him start to leak out and huffing at the instinctual sensation of loss he felt at it not being held within him as it should have been. None of it mattered in that moment though, as he continued forward and wrapped his hand around Will's squeezing his knot, milking him as he continued to come and groan and shake.

*

Hannibal woke as he never had before. An alpha curled around him and a sense of satisfaction he hadn't known existed.

They were naked and both coated in come and slick. They stank of each other and the little dwelling was filled with the scent of their love making.

"Good morning," Will drawled next to his ear before nuzzling into the soft fur of it and tightening the arm that was around Hannibal, pulling him closer.

Hannibal smiled, letting Will pull their bodies flush together and paw at him. In fact he never wanted to wake up any other way again.

The thought that such a life might not be possible for him, thoughts of his family and whatever was to happen with them - none of which would include Will - brought reality crashing in.

Their night together had been perfect. Beautiful.

And now it was over and Hannibal was consumed with regret over things he'd said and done. He rolled onto his back, which forced Will, in the tight space, to move over him slightly.

Will smiled down at him, stroking his ears, though hesitating for a moment when Hannibal began to speak.

"About what I said, about knotting… I shouldn't have asked," Hannibal said bluntly, wanting to apologise but there was also part of him that didn't want to have to. Didn't want it to be something that they had to deny themselves, though he knew Will was right in what he had said.

The alpha shrugged and gave a half smile, "Don't worry about it, sex can make people a little crazy. I knew you didn't mean it."

Will's tone was reassuring and Hannibal's stomach dropped. He couldn't help but ask coolly, "Why do you think I didn't mean it?"

Will looked at him then and blinked.

"Hannibal… You can't… It isn't that I don't like you. I do, I don't just sleep with any and every omega that crosses my path. But… If there was ever any remote chance you could get pregnant…" Will trailed off, maybe hoping he didn't have to say the rest but when Hannibal didn't respond he continued, "You're going home. If you… I wouldn't be okay if you went home and were carrying my pups. I wouldn't want them there."

Hannibal felt his gut tightening and he understood. He really did.

"They would sell them or… worse… *My* pups…" Will said quietly, looking down.

He hadn't thought about it before meeting Will, not really. Not in those terms. He himself had been taken from his parents in the way that would happen to his own pups. A way that didn't happen to these strays.

"I understand," Hannibal responded, sadly. The thought making him desperately forlorn, and yet he couldn't see any other future than going home. In the end it was a choice now, between Will and Mischa.

*

Will felt a mixture of relief and loss when he left the shed to go and find them some breakfast, this time fruit from one of the orchards.

What had happened with Hannibal wasn't something he had planned or even really known he'd wanted. But he did want Hannibal. He really did. There was something about him, the

pup beneath the airs and graces the Institute had instilled in him, that attracted Will.

But the talk of knotting, of pups, of a future that was never going to happen? It was too much to take in. Will had never expected that life for himself. Not when he was with humans and not after.

He wasn't someone humans would ever plan to breed, and so even just being with an omega during their heat was not something likely to happen. And despite a few dalliances here and there once he'd been freed from the humans, it had never occurred to him for any of them to be serious.

He was busy. He spent most of his time helping those settled in this no-man's land, but also those that wanted to escape to the rumoured better life that awaited - to that city they all hoped was there. He had no time for an omega and pups of his own, and it was something he'd never even wanted before.

Until Hannibal.

It had taken everything in him to hold back from that instinct to knot and breed the omega. It would most likely have not taken, given how he wasn't in heat. But if it was close enough, his body ready, then Hannibal had a chance of getting pregnant had Will knotted him.

Will shook away the thought of Hannibal round with his pups. He had done the right thing, knotting in Hannibal's fist rather than inside him. The risk had been more than he could allow.

He let out a low growl at the thought as he made his way back to the shed, whatever happened, he would never allow his own pups to be taken by humans.

*

Hannibal had eaten so much fruit that he felt a little unwell.

Or at least he told himself that when he tried to ignore that he should go home. The morning was soon turning into midday, and they still sat in Will's little shed.

The breakfast of peaches had been filling and sickly. And after Hannibal had gone outside and found the water and washed up, he returned to sit silently and watch Will about his business.

"Do you… need to visit people today?" Hannibal asked, almost hopeful that the answer would be yes and he'd be able to join in, perhaps it might then be too late in the day for Will to take him home.

Will shook his head. He was sat on the bed with his back towards Hannibal as he hunched over the makeshift shelf opposite the bed, threading things in some way. Intricate work, Hannibal could see, even if he didn't understand it.

"No, not today. I need to get these lures finished. I'm taking some of the older pups down to the river soon to teach them how to fish. So they can help provide for their families," Will

explained, still concentrating intently on what he was doing.

“There’s a river?” Hannibal asked, perking up “I’ve only ever seen pictures of rivers and lakes. Or the sea. Jimmy said his family took him to a beach once, not all beaches allow canis or cattus.”

Will huffed but said nothing, his body looking tense for a moment before he relaxed again.

“It’s the opposite direction to the city. Not far from here, but outside of this area. Wild, reclaimed land, so I take the pups and teach them to be safe and to fish.”

“It sounds beautiful,” Hannibal replied wistfully, imagining a wild field and a babbling river, like pictures he’d seen.

Will turned and looked at him then, his creased brow relaxing and a soft smile spreading across his face.

“It is,” Will agreed.

“I’d love to…” Hannibal started but then trailed off, knowing that it wasn’t something he’d be able to partake in. Will’s smile faded in an instant and he turned back to his lures.

They went back to sitting in silence for a short while, before Hannibal began to curiously look about the place. Now taking in every detail.

"What's this?" Hannibal asked, picking one slim book off of the other end of the shelf that Will was using as a table. It was clearly meant for children and had some very detailed illustrations. It seemed old and well thumbed.

"A reminder." Will said with a frown. Even so, he sat back from his lures and gave Hannibal his full attention. "Every time I get worn down by it all I try to remember the bigger picture. That keeps me going."

Hannibal cocked his head in question and Will took the book from him, turning a few pages so that Hannibal could see all the illustrations.

"Have you seen these before?" Will asked, pointing at the animals rendered on the page.

Hannibal shook his head, they seemed in some way familiar but he was sure he hadn't ever seen any himself.

"They are apes. Gorillas, chimps... same family as humans. They are along the same evolutionary line as Homo Sapiens." Will explained. Hannibal nodded, understanding now why he could see the familiarity. "They live in the wild in some places or used to at least, but are mostly in zoos." Will took a breath and turned the page. "You won't have seen these." Will continued.

The illustrations were of little four legged animals, some of which had ears like Hannibal's. He frowned, confused by the strange pull he felt within him when he saw the images. A strange anger that started up that pain within him again.

"What..." Hannibal ran his finger over the illustrations, as though he would glean more knowledge that way.

"They are dogs. Canis Canis. They are to us what apes are to humans." Will explained, a quiver in his voice.

"Wh-what happened to them?" Hannibal was baffled. Why had he never seen such animals?

"Humans have longer lifespans than us. We age quicker, die sooner. Our generations are short and... well, it's so easy for us to believe that things have always been the way they are now. But they haven't been. They were different. Dogs and cats..." Will flicked the page to pictures of more strange animals. "They were domesticated by humans, they were their pets. But then something happened. A great catastrophe - a disease that killed off cats and dogs and some other mammals. Leaving the humans with no pets... so they..."

“What, Will? I don’t understand.”

“They bred us. Science,” Will waved his hand dismissively, “They wanted their pets back. Only then it wasn’t just pets. Not just cats and dogs, like these. They made us out of blood and bones and out of themselves,” Will pointed at the page and then took the book. He flicked to the back and pulled out an age stained leaflet and lay it out on the bed between them.

Hannibal looked down and swallowed, his heart racing. It was an advert. For canis sapiens. To buy them as pets - these new hybrid animals. The new sapiens.

He shook and ran a finger over the sweet, demure creatures on the advert.

“Who were they?” Hannibal asked with a lump in his throat and pain rolling through him.

Will shrugged, “Those two? I don’t know. Maybe some of the earliest Canis that they…” Will sighed. “They made us more than what we’d been before but then… that’s not a pet. They…”

"They enslaved us." Hannibal finished. “I understand.”

And he did. But he knew more than ever he had to go back to Mischa.

*

Hannibal trembled as Will escorted him across the unfamiliar terrain and back towards the city. A large part of him didn’t want to return. And not just because of Will and everything that had happened between them. Also because of what he had learned.

The idea of going back was terrifying, and he wasn’t sure he’d be able to leave again if he did. But there were those he couldn’t abandon, for various reasons. None of which he knew how to explain to Will.

Though he didn’t seem to have to. It appeared Will understood enough to not try and stop him, to even help him.

They walked in silence, not only because they might not have had anything left to say, but also because they were heading into no-canis land. The area right on the edge of the city that was patrolled by Enforcers. The only part outside of the glossy and sparkling city that any homo sapiens set foot. And those that did were brutish and unforgiving, Hannibal knew from stories told at the Institute to frighten the pups into good behaviour.

It wouldn't do to draw attention to themselves, and Will had already explained that whilst he was adept at getting in and out of the city when he needed to, it was always harder with two. Especially one so inexperienced to this way of life as Hannibal.

Will stopped and Hannibal automatically did the same, dropping to his haunches to mirror Will's movements. He could hear something, scent it too. Will's ears twitched and swivelled as he tried to focus on the noise.

Hannibal could sense his confusion, it wasn't clear whether the presence was homo sapien or something else. Either way, Hannibal had the feeling that it would be best to be cautious. He'd been lucky with Will finding him in that alleyway. Not all canis that lived in these parts were as honourable as his stray alpha.

Will looked around them, tentatively, before leaning in close and whispering, "A patrol. Three I think. We'll wait for them to pass."

Hannibal nodded, ready to run but settled by the gentle hand Will rested on the base of his back. A soft smile there when Hannibal turned to look.

He hesitated a moment before leaning in to steal one last kiss before they got to the city. It was chaste, just a small reminder of what they had shared. And he sighed as Will hummed against him, his hand rubbing circles at the base of his back. Gentling him like a good alpha would. It was all Hannibal had never known he wanted and the thought ignited that sharp pain again, the thing buried within him. His nature of instinct to become something more than he was. Something that, right now at least, was just beyond his reach. But knowing Will had brought him closer to it, closer to understanding it and embracing it, ignited something inside him.

Will was just pulling back, still smiling, as the shadows fell across them.

Before they had a chance to react, they were surrounded.

Will leapt to his feet , snarling as he went for one of the Enforcers, all wearing thick protective clothing and masks, unlike those in the city. Hannibal felt something break within him, an instinct he'd never tapped into before but knew it for what it was immediately. Knew that this was part of his true nature that the humans had wanted to suppress. He growled and lunged, knocking one Enforcer over, his teeth searching for the man's throat once he was on his back.

His protective clothing was a barrier but Hannibal tried nonetheless, snapping his jaws at the human.

And then Will yelped and Hannibal turned to see him going down, a moment before he felt the sting of something lodging in his neck, and saw the Enforcer with the tranquiliser pistol.

Everything went black.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal manage to find their happy ending int his dystopian nightmare

“Look, that one, he ain’t no stray. Probably a reward out for him.”

The words drifted down the corridor to Will’s twitching ears just as he started to come around. He felt groggy and a little sick from whatever they stuck him with.

They were in a cell. Not just he and Hannibal but three other canis in varying conditions, though all clearly strays. The cell had four bunks, he and Hannibal occupying one together. It stank, both the bedding and the cell, a basic latrine in the corner at least accounted for some of it.

Hannibal was awake and shivering, curled against Will’s side. No doubt also suffering the aftereffects of the tranquiliser.

“You’re okay,” Will reassured him.

Hannibal startled and a look of relief washed over him as he gripped Will tighter.

“I thought… I thought you might not wake up,” Hannibal admitted. He was clearly freaked out and the drugs they’d pumped them with definitely weren’t helping.

Will wrapped his arms around omega and held him tight.

“I’ve been places like this before pigeon, we’ll get out of here,” Will said with more confidence than he felt. Whilst it was true he had escaped Enforcers more than once, he had been on his own and with his wits about him. As was already obvious, Hannibal compromised him.

Hannibal let out a shaky breath and nodded a moment before one of the Enforcers appeared at the barred cell front.

“You. Pretty dog. You from the city? Got people? Owners?” The man was eyeing him over, looking for the collar he had discarded at Will’s.

Will couldn’t help the little snarl as the man addressed Hannibal. He felt Hannibal shake and yet his expression made it clear that it was from anger as much as fear. Will was sure Hannibal had never been treated like this in his life, never exposed to these conditions. His indignation was probably in overdrive.

Will had to hold back his own reaction, which was to proclaim the omega his and not the property of any damn dirty ape. But he held his tongue to avoid more trouble.

He felt Hannibal shudder before he nodded. It didn't seem like fear, but there was definitely a reaction there from Hannibal that Will couldn't quite name.

"Darling Street," Hannibal said, "The Lecter family."

The man nodded, looking Hannibal over again before casting an amused glance at Will. "Well, we'll see what they have to say. Might be that they don't want you back if you've run off with a stray," the tone was cruel and Will felt Hannibal surge against him as though he wanted to attack the man, but was holding himself back.

A glimpse at the omega he felt lay inside the pampered pup.

*

They were all woken just before dawn by the clanging of a baton against the bars of their cells. Will had only been dozing, this place wasn't somewhere he'd sleep soundly, but even so the noise was jarring.

"Lecter," The Enforcer snapped and he felt Hannibal go rigid beside him, "You're being collected in an hour. Might want to make yourself look presentable," again there was a note of humour, a taunt.

Will understood what they saw. A sullied omega, stupid enough to get himself involved with a stray and picked up by Enforcers. He expected that the Enforcers would be delighted onlookers when Hannibal was returned to his family and any drama that ensued.

The Enforcer chuckled and wandered off.

Hannibal let out a breath and curled himself against Will, melting against him as Will pulled his arms around him.

"You should wash up," Will muttered into Hannibal's hair.

The sink next to the latrine was small and somewhat dirty, but he knew Hannibal should at least make the effort to wash off some of the dirt and grim from their journey.

Hannibal shook his head, "I… I want to smell of you for as long as possible."

Will let out a shuddering breath at the admission, his arms tightening.

They spent the next hour in each other's arms, unable to do anything other than hold each other, given the circumstances. This also brought a dark laugh from the Enforcer that came to collect him.

"Time to go. Let's hope your owners don't get a surprise when they expect you to go into heat," more taunts that had Will snarling.

Hannibal wasn't pregnant, he knew. The Enforcer was happy to have that joke at their expense, at the thought that Hannibal might be rejected if pregnant by a stray, or what fate might befall the pups. And it turned Will's stomach.

The Enforcer stood watching with a sneer as Hannibal and Will held each other for a fraction of a moment and then released. Hannibal got up from the bunk, starting to walk towards the door that was being unlocked, before turning back to Will.

"I'm sorry Will, you shouldn't be here… If…"

Will cut him off with a small shake of his head, "No Hannibal. You might not be mine, but… I would never abandon you." The words hurt deep in his chest, on so many levels. "I'll be okay, don't worry. I can take care of myself."

He wanted Hannibal to be his. He would never abandon him.

Hannibal let out a gentle sigh and looked away, "I wanted to go back because… I just… I believe you, I believe it all. But they're still my family. I still feel a sort of… responsibility to Mischa. I love her. If I just explained to them, then-"

"Hannibal," Will said his name gently, understanding how hard it was to come to terms with all this stuff. "They know. They know and at best just don't care. They all know. But… I understand."

And he did. If things had been different and Will had had the chance to return to Jack, then he would have. Until the point that he wouldn't have, and Hannibal wasn't there yet. He'd only been away from his comfortable life and, purportedly kind humans, for a few days.

The door swung open and the Enforcer lifted a looped poll, putting the end around Hannibal's neck and pulling it chockingly tight as he guided the omega out and then locked the door behind him.

Restrained as he was, Hannibal was unable to glance back, so Will watched him go, feeling a fierce tug at his heart and a longing to taste blood.

*

When Hannibal heard the annoyed voice of Aunt Murasaki, his blood ran cold.

"Horrible beast."

Hannibal yelped as she tugged roughly at the choke chain he'd been put in, until he was in the back of the vehicle and they were on their way home.

Home.

It didn't quite feel like home anymore. As the opulent neighbourhoods went by, with their big houses and manicured lawns that Hannibal had so enjoyed, they felt jarring now. They felt false - achieved at the expense of others. A false life built on lies. The grass might as well be hot ashes.

As they got closer to the Lecter house they passed the early morning walkers. Owners, or more often than not their staff, taking the canis for a walk. They looked happy and docile on their leashes and Hannibal was reminded of his first meeting with Will. What a shock to him the gruff and cynical stray had been. He understood it all now, and with each passing street he wondered if he had made the right decision to return. It was hard to ignore the large part of him that wanted to stay with Will. But Mischa...

Surely not all the humans could be bad. Not his humans. If they knew, if he explained to them what was going on, surely they wouldn't stand for it? The same with Brian and Jimmy's owners. If humans like them knew, good and kind people, there would be riots in the streets, Hannibal was sure.

He just had to wait for them to return home so he could explain it all. See his darling Mischa, and know he'd made the right decision.

This thought was met with a reminder of the reason the Lecters had gone away - his prospective alpha. The thought made Hannibal's stomach turn for multiple reasons. This proof of their servitude and oppression, The lack of his own will. The lack of Will. Another alpha in his place.

Hannibal let out a little whine at the thought, receiving an immediate and pointed look from Aunt Murasaki, and a sharp pull on the chain that choked the sound from him.

In this life he wouldn't ever be able to choose an alpha for himself, much less the one he had started to fall in love with. Hannibal held back his tears and closed his eyes, trying to block out this now alien world he was trapped in. Not unless the Lecter's really could see through all this and know how wrong it was that the canis were kept this way.

He had hope.

*

"Will?" The sharp voice stirred Will from his thoughts about Hannibal, and he looked up to see one of the dogs from his allotment. Or at least she had been. It had been months since Will had seen her.

"Freddie? The Enforcers got you?" Will asked as he sat up on the bunk and talked through the bars to the next cell.

"Pfft, hardly." She replied tersely, shaking out her long, fluffy red ears.

Freddie grated on him at times, but he had to admit that she was one of the most tenacious canis he'd ever met. Despite being pure bred, all soft fur and delicate features, she'd been at the allotments since she was a pup and was as streetwise as any he'd ever met.

She looked at him, waiting for an explanation as to his own presence there, given that she knew as well as he did that he was damn near uncatchable.

"I was… helping a canis return to the city and we got distracted, now I'm here and he's been returned to his owners." He hated the sound of that word in his mouth and Freddie visibly tensed at it too.

Then she smiled, a cruel tease, as was her habit. "If the Enforcers had known they just needed a pretty omega to lure you into their clutches I'm sure they'd have arranged that sooner."

"It wasn't like that…" Will said quietly, his thoughts on what might be waiting for Hannibal at his home. Would they punish him? Would they throw him out?

Freddie hummed thoughtfully, though there was a tone to it that made her seem almost uninterested.

"So, you want to get out of here? Or are you planning on a long stay?" She taunted.

Will quirked his head, his ears pointing forward to take in what she was saying.

"Next shift change," She told him in a low voice, "Be ready."

Will nodded and lay back on his bunk to stare at the cracked ceiling once more as he heard Freddie saunter back into the depths of her cell.

He had started to drift off into a nap when he heard the clunking sound of the external doors - the guard change. He sprang up, suddenly and totally alert as he heard the humans talking and disappearing into the office. They did this every shift change, Will had noted. For ten minutes or more they would do their handover and then chat and smoke until those now off duty left and patrolling the cells resumed.

The cells, as far as Will was aware, were completely secure and there was no escape from the building.

A short, sharp whistle from Freddie, pulled his attention.

She stood next to the bars, between a couple of the bunks. One of Will's sedate cellmates stood his side of the bars.

"Come on," She hissed impatiently and Will jumped off his bunk and over to the bars. Freddie gave the nod and the other canis twisted one of the bars and then pulled. It came away, leaving just enough of a gap for someone to squeeze through, which Will did immediately.

Once on the other side, he turned to see the other canis replacing the bar and quietly going back to his bunk to lay back down.

Freddie tugged on his arm and pulled him to the back of her cell, the four other occupants not paying any attention at all until she got to the back wall. And then two of them were immediately there, lifting a bunk between them, moving it from the wall so that it made no sound on the floor.

Once far enough from the wall, Freddie got behind the bunk and gave a steady shove, A whole section of brickwork moved inward, into a passage behind the wall. Freddie went through and signalled for Will to follow even as the other canis were moving the furniture back. Once he was in the little cavern, Freddie pushed the section of bricks back into place.

"How-" Will started, but Freddie held a finger to her lips and shook her head. She mimed walking around with her fingers and then perked an ear up. Okay, so the patrols would hear them, he gave a nod to show he understood. Happy to be guided by her.

It took over an hour of crawling through tunnels of varying widths and qualities before they emerged in the wasteland, an area full of scrubby overgrowth to make the tunnel almost undetectable. The only thing marking it out was the large rock next to it that obscured it ever so slightly.

Will took in a lungful of the fresh air and then turned to Freddie, who was grinning widely at him.

"The allotments are that way," She pointed off into the distance, the rundown and derelict buildings of his home barely visible on the horizon. She hesitated but grinned as she pointed in another direction, "And the city is that way."

Will nodded, getting his bearings, but his gaze falling on the city limits and remaining there.

"You're an idiot," She muttered, before starting back into the tunnel.

"You're going back?"

"Of course. Two square meals a day, shelter? Besides who else is going to help fools like you get back out into the world at large?"

She huffed and was gone into the tunnel before he could thank her. His focus settled back on the city.

*

Hannibal whimpered, feeling the weight of his collar in a way he never had before. It was made of chain, not the plush leather he'd left at Will's. And it was tighter than the Lecters had ever put one on in the past. It chaffed and choked him a little.

The Lecters would be home soon and they'd clear all this up. Aunt Murasaki and the cattus would be gone. He would explain everything to the Lecters and life could go back to normal.

Though it couldn't, Hannibal knew.

He couldn't continue as things had been and ignore everything he'd learned. And he couldn't forget about Will, the alpha he truly wanted. If he explained it all to the Lecters, he knew they would be sympathetic. They were good people, they wouldn't sit by if they knew that the canis and cattus were human hybrids - full of the same emotions and thoughts and not just pets. They had been trained into subservience. But once they acknowledged that, did he stay as their guest? Everything was so uncertain.

Hannibal curled up on his side, his ear falling forward so that his breath ruffled the fur. He focused on it, zoning out a little until he realised he was being watched.

He sat bolt upright and took in the smirks of Bee and Delia, looking down at him.

"The puppy has returned," There was humour in Delia's hiss.

"Leave me alone," Hannibal huffed, realising he wasn't nearly as intimidated by them as he had been before, not after everything he'd been through since they last met.

The cattus laughed in unison, a light and delicate laugh that was somehow still snide and cruel.

Hannibal huffed and lay back down, which seemed to amuse them somewhat.

“Cat got your tongue, dog?” Bee asked, taunting.

Hannibal huffed again and then drew a settling breath, "You don't scare me. I've seen scarier things than you. I know scarier things…" He trailed off, unsure whether he should say more. The cattus continued to just look amused.

"Oh, do share," Bee pushed, clearly entertained.

"We're slaves you know," Hannibal snapped.

The cattus both cocked their heads at the same time, amusement still there.

Hannibal continued tentatively, "The humans made us to be like this. They made us-"

He was startled into silence by the trill of cruel laughter.

"Oh poor puppy dog. We know that's what you are, a dog. A silly little dog." Delia said in mock pity and they both stepped forward together until they were crouched next to Hannibal. They pet his ears and sneered at him.

"Cats have much longer lifespans than dogs. Our mother told us all about it when we were kittens. It’s common knowledge amongst most cattus…” She trailed off, looking at him like he was an idiot.

Hannibal frowned, his breath caught in his throat, “But you… you don’t… You just go along with it!”

Bee chimed in again, “Silly. Little. Dog.” Her lips curled into a snarl, “You clearly don’t know when you’ve got it good. Would you rather fend for yourself? Have no roof over your head. You really are quite ridiculous.”

They both sneered at him, clearly amused.

And before he had left, Hannibal might have been intimidated by them, maybe even a little scared. But instead his blood boiled and he felt that pain inside him strike. That instinct.

An instinct to shake off the shackles he had willingly gone back to and leave havok in his wake.

Before he had realised it, his mouth had curved into a snarl and a growl rose in his throat.

Delia hissed and both cattus narrowed their eyes at him.

“Be careful, pup. The Enforcers are only a call away.” Bee threatened before they turned in unison and sauntered back into the house.

*

Will found the Lecter house easily. It wasn’t just the rough memory he had of the location, but something more - a sense of where Hannibal was even before he scented him.

Where *his* omega was. Because there was no denying even to himself that Hannibal was anything less than that.

Regardless of their different situations and temperaments, they had formed a connection. One that Will had begun to wonder, as he made his way through the city, if they might turn into a mating bond.

That was if he could get Hannibal to leave with him.

He could have gone back to his life and waited, wondering if the omega might return. Certainly he wasn’t convinced that any canis could return to humans once they knew the truth. But in some weird way he’d understood why Hannibal had felt obliged to. And why he in turn had felt the need to come after him and be there when things inevitably soured.

He would wait until the Lecters behaved in a way they inevitably would, and then - the omega being clear about the cruelty of homo sapiens - Will would rescue him.

“What are you talking about Hannibal? This is… this isn’t a polite topic of discussion…” Will remembered the voice of Jimmy, one of the canis that lived next to Hannibal, and stopped at the sound of his words coming from Hannibal’s garden.

Will stepped quietly to the fence and looked through the slats to see the two neighbouring canis looking glum and concerned, whilst Hannibal sat there with a tight collar, chained to a pole.

Will’s breath caught in his throat and he balled his fists in anger at how the humans had treated him. He wanted to bust in there and free his omega, but knew it wouldn’t be as simple as that. Besides, from the smell of things, Hannibal’s owners had returned yet.

And part of him was glad for the delay. In the back of his mind he couldn’t help the concern that Hannibal’s owners would return home with information about the alpha they had picked out for him and Hannibal would be pleased with it. He knew it wasn’t really true - that there wasn’t any match favourable enough to make Hannibal ignore everything he had discovered. And wasn’t Will his alpha? Hadn’t he called him that and wanted to stay in his arms? To be scented by him?

Will closed his eyes and drew in a breath, seeking Hannibal's scent on the air. It was immediately there and familiar and made him ache with want.

He let the breath out steadily, shaking a little and his chest tightening. He knew Hannibal was safe and well, even if he was chained. He'd wait and try to ignore the insecurities that love was bringing out in him.

Will made his way along to the next house, the next garden, crawling under the fence and settling in an intentionally overgrown patch of flowers that hid him well enough from the house.

"I think that stray was filling your head with nonsense." Jimmy continued with a huff. There was a nervousness to his voice that made Will wonder how much he suspected but ignored in order to avoid becoming one of the strays he clearly feared he might become.

"Jimmy's right," Brian said softly, "it's best you forget all about it. The Lecters will be home tomorrow and they will have found you a wonderful alpha. One that you'll be proud to have pups with."

Will heard Hannibal whine his unhappiness at the words, and Will felt it down to his bones.

But it wasn't going to happen, Will reminded himself. Tomorrow would come, the Lecters would return, and he would be there when Hannibal needed him.

He would wait.

*

Hannibal sighed as Jimmy and Brian left, neither of them would listen or take him seriously no matter how he tried to explain it.

In the end he fell asleep in the little out-house in the garden, the one that had only ever been used in the past as shade on a sunny day. He'd never been kept from the house before. Before, if this had happened he might have taken it as a deserved punishment that he needed to learn from. But after the last few days it was a stark reminder of the unspoken truth.

He could never see anything the same again. From his own life and interactions with humans - pleasant if unknowingly subservient. To those of others, and not just the strays. But those like Will - who Will had been. A working canis, used for his skills and discarded so easily when no longer wanted. Hannibal could think of many around his neighbourhood alone that worked in one way or another. What would happen to them when they were no longer useful?

The thought made him shudder and coloured his dreams.

When he woke the next day he felt stiff and cold. Not because of the temperature, but the lack of Will next to him. He had never felt lonely before but he felt it keenly now.

Despite the gnawing ache within him, Hannibal sprang to his feet when he heard the familiar vehicle pull up outside, knowing his family - his owners - were home.

“What on earth…” Mr Lecter frowned as he came around the side of the house and saw Hannibal chained to the pole.

Hannibal smiled warmly at him, trying not to seem as excited as he was to see his master. He was a good canis and held his tongue, not speaking until he had been asked a question.

“Was it those cats, boy?” Mr Lecter grinned and walked over to him as Mrs Lecter rounded the corner. “Aunt Murasaki probably let them all over the furniture without you there to keep an eye on them.”

Hannibal bit his lower lip, wanting to explain it all but not wanting to be a bad pet.

The pain inside him stabbed and left him feeling hollow.

“Wait!” Murasaki was at the door, the cattus stood directly behind her, all three wearing angry sneers. “Do what you will with that animal once I’m gone, but leave him there for now. I personally think you should turn him over to the Enforcers. He tried to harm Mischa.”

“Hannibal?” Mrs Lecter queried, incredulous, “No, I don’t believe it. He dotes on her. He wouldn’t harm a bone in her body.”

Murasaki held up the papers in her hand and Hannibal knew them to be the Enforcer’s reports. “Perhaps he isn’t the good pet you think he is.”

Hannibal watched, his heart pounding as Mr Lecter took the papers and scanned over them before handing them to Mrs Lecter.

Silently they all went indoors.

It felt like hours later that Mr Lecter came out and unchained Hannibal, leading him into the house. He could see Mrs Lecter returning from putting Mischa down for a nap and he was struck by the ache of how much he wanted to see the baby.

The three humans had stern looks, the two cattus wore smug expressions, and Hannibal felt so small.

“Hannibal, we’ve found you a wonderful alpha. A canis that would sire some beautiful pups on you, but I hope you can understand that we’re having doubts. That Aunt Murasaki might be right and you should be sent to the Enforcers. We never expected you to be troublesome like this.” Mr Lecter’s words were cold and Hannibal found himself shocked at that.

Neither of the Lecters had ever spoken to him with anything less than adoration. He had always felt like a part of their family. And now? Now those few words had made clear how disposable he was.

“Speak,” Mr Lecter commanded and Hannibal bowed his head.

“I… I would never do anything to hurt Mischa. It was all a mistake. I hope you can believe me but…” The searing pain within him grew and he knew he had to be brave. He had to say

this and make them understand. They were influential people, he knew, so the difference they could make if they only knew the truth…

“I… I don’t think I want the alpha you’ve selected. I… don’t want to have pups. Not like this.”

Mrs Lecter tried to hide her slight gasp and Murasaki let out a small cry of outrage.

“Well, I never heard of such a thing! You should call the Enforcers at once!” Murasaki’s tone was indignant.

“Don’t you see?” Hannibal pleaded, knowing he had to continue now despite the way Mr Lecter’s face was turning red with anger. “We’re humans too. This is… The way we are kept, the way we are bred. It’s wrong. I knew that if I could only make you understand then you’d be-”

“Enough!” Mr Lecter slammed his fist down on the table and Hannibal jumped. He’d never seen the man angry before.

“But… you have to see! They bred the canis and cattus to be pets, but we’re human too. Hybrids. Evolved and enslaved, but if people like you - good people like you - know about it then you can help us and-”

Hannibal was stunned as he was struck across the face by the back of Mr Lecter’s hand. He felt a ringing in his head and anger rise up within him. He tasted blood in his mouth.

“You will not speak of such things.” Mr Lecter growled.

Hannibal looked at the human faces around him and saw the same thing. Faces red with humiliation and anger. Set with determined hate.

Yes, they hated him.

And that was how he knew.

They had always known this truth and chose to ignore it. Chose to accept it and benefit from it. And now they had been confronted with it.

Mr Lecter was on his feet then, pulling Hannibal back outside as he told Mrs Lecter to call the Enforcers.

Hannibal whined. Caught between how he should behave and his instincts.

His instincts told him to rip out Lecter’s throat.

Hannibal winced at the pain. Not of being dragged out but of the war waging within him.

In the distance, sirens sounded and Hannibal knew the Enforcers were on their way.

He hadn't expected this. Truly he hadn't. He thought the Lecters were good people. And to other homo sapiens, they no doubt were.

Hannibal growled and snapped at Lecter the moment he tried to secure him to the pole again. The unexpected turn caused Mr Lecter to let go, leaving Hannibal stood there, shaking and teeth bared.

Blood was thundering in his ears, he felt every hair on his body stood on end, and the scent of Will was in his nose.

The last, at first, he thought was a trick of his senses. But then the alpha pushed through the garden gate and made his way to Hannibal, growling at Mr Lecter.

"Hannibal" Mr Lecter shouted, "Enough!"

But Hannibal didn't back down. He wouldn't have even if his alpha hadn't appeared at his side. He had been pushed over into that aching pain within him and now had to embrace it. His instincts and true nature. Becoming what he was always meant to be.

The sirens were on top of them now, lights flashing outside the house and the sound of feet hitting the driveway.

"It'll be okay," Will reassured through grit teeth.

"Here, here they are!" Murasaki came rushing into the garden followed by the Enforcers. "If you want my advice you'll destroy that animal at once" Murasaki spat the words.

"Don't worry ma'am, we'll take care of this one," The Enforcer stepped forward and looped the choke collar around Will's neck.

"No," Hannibal cried out, reaching for Will but the Enforcer jerked him back, causing Will to lose his footing.

Hannibal was shaking. The pain almost searing inside him now as instinct fought training.

"No!" He shouted, forceful this time, growling and glowering at the Enforcer, who for a moment took a hesitant step backwards.

"Both of them!" Mr Lecter shouted, turning his anger towards the Enforcers.

It was distraction enough for Hannibal to leap forward. He jumped on the Enforcer who had hold of Will and knocked him to the ground. The poll coming loose from his hands allowed Will to free himself from the choking loop.

Will tugged Hannibal up and off the Enforcer, "Time to go-"

"No," Hannibal bit back. "I can't… I can't leave her…"

The words came from somewhere he hadn't expected and broke his heart. With it, all the emotions flooded through him and instinct won out.

Mischa was innocent. He loved her. He would have given his life to protect her, he would still.

Before Will could stop him, Hannibal slammed Mr Lecter to the floor baring his teeth and snapping. He knew he couldn't waste time but it took only a moment to take a bite out of the man's cheek, leaving him screaming as Hannibal then took off into the house, past Mrs Lecter who stood at the door screaming. He wanted to rip their throats out. He wanted to devour them. His enslavers. All of them. All the homo sapiens.

All but one.

Hannibal felt Will behind him and neither of them stopped until they were in the nursery and Hannibal slammed the door shut behind them, barely muffling Mrs Lecter's screams for her baby.

"Hannibal, you can't…"

Hannibal was already cooing over the little one who lay looking up at him with a smile. Awake now with no idea of what was behind the ruckus that likely woke her.

"I have to. She is so pure. So innocent. I can't let her become like them." Hannibal said the words gently, his hands shaking as he reached into the crib and she reached up towards him. "I have to protect her. Even if it is from them, even if it is from the way this world is."

There was a heavy slam against the door and Will threw his body against it, pulling over the rocking chair next to him and jamming it under the handle.

"Hannibal…" There was a plea in Will's tone and he wasn't sure what Will wanted or expected. He just knew what he had to do.

He gathered Mischa against him as she gurgled happily, and grabbed the go-bag that was always packed and ready on the side of the changing unit.

Then he turned and looked at Will. Determined. No hint of a question or a plea. She was coming with them.

Will clenched his jaw but nodded.

Ignoring the hammering at the door they moved quickly to the window and Will opened it quickly, jumping out before easing Hannibal and the baby out behind him.

"Thank you," Hannibal breathed the words against Will as the three of them were momentarily caught in an embrace. Will nuzzled him for a fraction of a second and then took his hand and ran.

"Here!" A low voice hissed and they turned to see a panel in the fence to the neighbour's garden being held aside by Jimmy. "Quickly."

Hannibal felt Will hesitate for a second, but Hannibal knew he could always trust Jimmy and so barrelled on. The moment they were through, Jimmy pushed the panel back into place and

they could hear the commotion had moved back into the Lecter's garden.

Jimmy pressed a finger to his lips and led them along the fence line until they were at the gate to the alley.

"Take care pup," Was all Jimmy said as he ruffled Hannibal's ears and then tweaked Mischa's cheek before opening the gate and letting them out.

"Thank you," Will told Jimmy as the gate closed. He took Hannibal's hand, gripping it tight and tugging him. "This way. We can make it."

Hannibal smiled, knowing if anyone could get them back out of the city, it was the stray who had turned his entire existence upside down.

Three Months Later

"She's more trouble now she can walk," Will grumbled good naturedly as Mischa laughed and pulled at his ears.

He couldn't say he minded really. She had quickly stolen his heart in the same way she had Hannibal's the moment she was born. And as rash as it had been, Will couldn't fault Hannibal's actions.

Mischa laughed at him and then ran off again, through the nice little home they had moved to.

Will chuckled as he heard the door to her room slam open. A little game of hide and seek.

He looked up when Hannibal didn't laugh too, seeing the omega distracted.

"Are you alright?" Will asked tentatively.

The last few weeks had been a big change for them both. They had gone from being in their respective lives, to being together. A family.

And after years of helping others escape to the near mythological city where they were all equal, it was Will's turn - his new family in tow.

When they had returned to the allotments, it was immediately clear they weren't safe. Will had no doubt that the Enforcers would come after them for the child. And whilst they might be turned back by the canis that wouldn't allow homo sapiens to intrude there, they couldn't risk it.

He gathered together the few that were next on his list to help leave. Some small families, some new arrivals. Tony, and a couple of the other humans who were starting to struggle and needed more and more assistance that they would hopefully find at the end of their journey.

It was terrifying. Because in truth he had no idea if the city existed. He knew where he had to get them to. Beyond the outer reaches of Hannibal's city and along the tracks that had once been used for large vehicles to move people and goods. What if it wasn't a haven? What if it

didn’t exist at all? He’d had to trust that it did, the way so many before had trusted in him that it did.

And here they were. Welcomed with open arms, greeted by many he’d helped in the past. They had their own little home. The sort humans lived in, here they all had them. The canis, the few cattus. There were humans too. Those like Tony, and those like Hannibal had hoped the Lecters would be.

No human was allowed to raise their voice or hand. And punishments, when needed - thankfully rarely - were swift and harsh. Will couldn't help but recall with some want, the look in Hannibal's eyes when they had witnessed one of the punishments. Two humans brought forward for public punishment. One had raised her hand to a canis and had it removed for her troubles, lest she ever be tempted again.

The other was an Enforcer, caught patrolling the area between the cities, and too close to this one for comfort. Will had heard of Enforcers that went further out never returning. And now he knew why.

Hannibal's instincts as a hunting dog had never been clearer as they watched the man beheaded to the howls of the crowd. Will had loved that look in his eyes, the true animal within him now free.

They all ate well that evening.

There was a sense of hunger now as Hannibal looked up at him. A hunger like he'd never seen before, burning within him.

"Hannibal…" The words trailed off as he caught the scent at the back of his throat.

"Alpha…" Hannibal breathed out the word and Will trembled.

Will took a steadying breath and got to his feet, "Wait here," He commanded in an alphan tone he'd never had cause to use before, and went looking for Mischa.

Tony and the helper that now lived with him - another human - were more than happy to take the little one. Understanding with knowing smiles as Will kissed her goodbye and made his excuses to get back to Hannibal as soon as he could.

When he walked in, the scent had become oppressive and filled every corner of their little house.

His cock throbbed immediately.

He’d wanted this so much, they both had. After the stress and trauma of the last few weeks, Hannibal’s first heat had finally arrived.

A chance, if they wanted to take it, to bond, to continue their family.

And they did want to. They had discussed it at length, whispered moments as they made love once they had settled in this new place. Where they could keep their pups and raise them in

safety. Things that Will had never considered before now felt so vital.

He wanted to give Hannibal the family the omega wanted, but only because he wanted it too. A life he'd never dreamed of having nor wanted, was now possible and desirable.

"Hannibal…" His voice was raspy, his heart thundering in his chest as his rut started to descend. They would be locked together for a day or two now, less time if Hannibal caught quickly.

The thought made Will's cock pulse with need, his knot throbbing.

He heard the omega whimpering, still sat where Will had left him.

"Hannibal," This time it came out like a devotion, and Will surged quickly forward to pull the omega up into his arms.

He brushed Hannibal's long ears back over his shoulders to nuzzle at his scent glands. They were intoxicating with the heat scent, but they were also slightly swollen, waiting for the bonding bite.

"Alpha…" Hannibal shuddered and Will pulled back to look at him. "Will…" Hannibal sighed his name, and Will felt his heart expand. Hannibal didn't just want any alpha, even in the throes of his first heat and the unfamiliar sensations it brought, he wanted Will.

Will growled and lifted Hannibal off of his feet, carrying him through to their basic but comfortable bedroom and kicking the door closed behind them. It wasn't so much for privacy, what with Mischa taken care of, and no one silly enough to interrupt an alpha and omega during a heat. No, he just wanted to trap the scent in this smaller space. It had been so wonderful - thick and rich in the air - that he was sure, trapping it in this confined space would be like immersing himself in it, and he could think of nothing better.

Hannibal purred against his neck, "Knot me alpha…"

Will groaned at the thought. This time he could. Would. Secure in the knowledge that any resultant pups would be safe and taken care of, not sold off and exploited.

Will was shedding his clothes without moving back, not wanting to pull their bodies apart as Hannibal hungrily nuzzled at his throat, at his own glands that were swelling with his rut.

They had come to know each other's bodies well, but they had never done this. They could have, but they seemed to have reached an unspoken agreement that Will wouldn't knot Hannibal until his heat - something to savour and rejoice.

Will had to pull back, finally, no other choice if he wanted to get his remaining clothes off, or Hannibal's for that matter. The omega took the opportunity to pull his top off and then stretch out on the bed. His nipples were a little swollen from his heat and the long fur of his ears cascaded beautifully over his bare shoulders.

Will couldn't help but whimper at the sight, stopping to palm himself before hastily removing every item of clothing on his lower half. Completely stripped, Will moved to Hannibal in a

rush before undoing his trousers teasingly slow. He pulled trousers and underwear down with the same slowness and had Hannibal whimpering. An unexpected laugh bubbled up Will's throat, giddy at the prospect of what was to come.

"Will," Hannibal breathed his name and reached up his hands, stopping Will from descending, as he had made to, to lower his mouth between Hannibal's thighs. "It would just be a tease, please don't. I'm ready for you… I need you." Hannibal struggled out the words, still so damn eloquent despite the hormones raging through his body.

"Fuck…" Will muttered, cock twitching at the thought of how much the omega needed him so completely and immediately. "Okay… okay…" He was shaking as he nodded his head, his rut starting to make him shake. His hips instinctively thrust forward before he was even in position, smearing precome along Hannibal's inner thigh.

They both whined and Will surged forward, immediately between Hannibal's legs, immediately inside him and pressing to the hilt. Hannibal groaned and clenched around him, making Will's knot throb as it started to press at Hannibal's entrance. Will wanted to lament how quickly this was going to be over, his knot already swelling, but he couldn't. It was going to be perfect come what may.

"Alpha…" Hannibal's word came out as a plea, an acknowledgement of his understanding of how quick this would be.

Will cried out as he pressed forward, sliding his rapidly expanding knot into Hannibal. Hannibal sobbed and clenched. Clutching to Will as they both let out sounds of pleasure and relief.

Finally. Finally, fully inside his omega as he should always have been.

"Alpha… Will…" Hannibal moaned again, this time something between a plea and relief, as though on the cusp of something. Something Will understood all too well as he filled the omega entirely with the most alphan part of himself, the part that would own Hannibal, and not just physically. He rut against Hannibal, his cock buried deep and knot only teasing at coming back out as he thrust shallowly.

"Hannibal…" Will muttered next to the omega's ear, "Mine…" Moving his lips down to worry at Hannibal's neck.

"Yes, yes Will…" Hannibal moaned and arched. Their bodies pressed completely together as Will sank his teeth into Hannibal's scent gland, the bond instinantly sparking through them.

Will cried out, his teeth releasing, as every nerve ending lit up with this new connection to the omega, his omega. His knot swelled to its fullest and he felt Hannibal's body instinctively clutch around him, locking them together.

"Love… you... " Will forced the words out as his body rattled with overwhelming sensations, "Hannibal… I love you…"

"Will...:" Hannibal sobbed.

A moment later, clinging to each other with no need to press against each other further, they both shuddered and sobbed as a joint climax ripped through them both. And in that moment of bonding, it felt like an echo of each other's pleasure.

Will's balls ached as they emptied inside Hannibal, coming over and over until Hannibal's belly - splattered with his own come - began to swell just enough to notice.

They remained caught in the moment together, exhausted and sated as they waited for what felt like a lifetime for Will's knot to deflate. And when it did they were both left with a residual sensation - as though both now occupying a permanent place within each other, whether tied or not.

It was hours later that Will woke, not realising they'd fallen asleep. He was immediately alert and expecting to find Hannibal in need of further attention.

But instead his omega lay there sleeping, snoring softly with a hand absentmindedly resting against his belly. Now no longer filled with Will's seed but something else, Will knew. As unexpected as it was, Hannibal had been satisfied, his heat sated by that one fateful knotting. That one that bound them together as lovers and more.

The one that heralded the start of a family of their own.

End Notes

I went over and over whether or not to give Bee and Delia a firm motive in what they do to Hannibal and I chose not to. Because it didn't feel relevant to the larger plot and sometimes cats are just assholes.

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